The Spectatorial Summer Zine

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EDITOR'S ADDRESS

Dear readers,

We hope the summer's been treating you well, wherever you are in the world. This zine is a little snapshot of what we've been doing this season. We're thrilled to present our first publication of the 2025-26 academic year. This year's summer zine was created entirely by masthead, from writing and editing, to layout and illustration.

This zine's theme is adventure. It's about the great battles and taming-of-dragons in a hero's journey, but also about the small journeys in a backyard, in one's head, in a friendship. Summer is the season of discovery, and we've catalogued a few of those discoveries here for you—everything from gods to breakfast, with a few unexpected twists within.

Thank you to all our contributors for their hard work both writing and editing. We're so pleased with all the effort that's been put into this zine and so excited for all the events and publications in the coming school year with our cool new masthead. And you, if you so please.

Thank you for reading. And consider checking out *The Spectatorial!* Who knows what you might find.

Ola, Miran, and Phoebe
Editors-in-Chief + Managing Editor

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MEET THE MASTHEAD

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Layout Design and Cover by Biew Biew Sakulwannadee

A FADING LIGHT

Jonah Watkins

Alvin stood victorious, golden light refracting through the stained glass in the throne room, surrounded by the furred inhabitants who had journeyed with him. The Great Darkness had been dispelled, cast out through his kindness and generosity and some handy magic. The Lady of the realm, freed at last from her cruelly crafted stasis, smiled upon him and her gaze was like a knife's edge, direct and clear, with a beauty in its danger.

"Behold," she intoned with a clarion voice, "A service has been done and now shall be rewarded. Return to whence you came, child, and remember. For as long as you hold us with you, we shall be here, to be remembered and held, to remind you of what you have done and who you are capable of being. Now, child, return."

As her lips closed, the windows shivered in their frames and a gale swept through the room. Alvin was swept up in the gale and next thing he knew, he was back on the hot concrete where he had found the door in the air.

In this way, Alvin left, and the world stood still. The whiskered cheeks of the subjects of the empire ceased their breathing and the wind which had danced in the branches of the trees stopped mid-breeze.

The first things to fade were the colors. The stained glass, which once marked in bright vermillion and sapphire a hundred thousand histories and victories, muted into a meaningless replica of burgundy and forest green, the same patterns on every wall.

As years passed (as much as time could have been said to pass at all in the frozen throne room) the remaining small and furry allies in the room faded as well, jowls softening and their visages flattening into something more resemblant of a rodent than their true faces, once been distinguished and dutiful, wise and thoughtful.

Even the gaze of the Lady faded. Where once it had seemed sharp, incisive and calculating, it had softened into a kind and matronly smile, the Lady giving the gift of return merely out of kindness, not with the shrewd lens of authority, serving her and her people as much as Alvin.

Slowly, languorously, the throne room itself shrank, the walls curving inwards as the dimensions shrank and shrank. The stained glass faded away, as if it was never there, though the light still burned as gold as ever. The floor vanished stone by stone as the walls drew inwards, step by infinitesimal step.

At last, the light dimmed, slowly ebbing into a quiet, cold, and empty dark, and there was naught left.

Meanwhile, the hot concrete sizzled as the sun baked Alvin's brow. He paused before continuing, ears cocking, as if some strange and ethereal dirge had caught his ear. Then he retraced his steps down the odd street he could recall ever seeing before, and continued on his way.

A NAME FIT FOR THE GODS

Crescentia Kim

Iuno could not tear her eyes from the airship.

It rose from the mountaintops of buildings and crested at the capital city's peak, the King's Spire. Its martial banners were tapestries embroidered by factory hands, made to attract worthy passersby to join an adventurer's guild, journey into the far reaches of the Empire, and promote His Majesty's sanctity.

The tapestries depicted famous battles of years past: royal knights subduing giants, dragons, and krakens. But the King could not rest yet, not until he delivered every human being of the nine worlds from the tyrannical rule of these creatures.

Glory to the Crusade!

Iuno's brother was ecstatic to enlist—it was not until he kneeled at the family altar for three days and three nights, refusing to partake of his victuals, that their father terminated his apprenticeship at the sky docks. He would later summon Iuno to the master room, her mother kneeling by his side, and hand Iuno a list of supplies to acquire by the morrow.

I can only leave this to you.

A rap on the desk distracted her from the storefront's green glass rosettes. The shopkeeper wrapped the bolts of fabric with age-old precision, before instructing Iuno on how to wash and maintain the goods in her most measured tones, even taking care to repeat after herself, multiple times at that. Iuno attempted not to let her upset show.

Does she think I only speak the migrant's tongue?

As if Iuno had spoken this thought out loud, the lady of the shop stopped and glared. Iuno grabbed her purchase as well as her leave of the building.

Lancelot Square, while a majestic shopping district of the city, was a derivative form of the royal quarter—aptly titled the Gardens of Camelot. Ever since England and all its neighbours became Britannia at the turn of the last century, every name had been changed. Parliament

and its people termed it, "a return to old form."

Iuno's parents had also thought it a sign of a greater future for themselves, hence her name. They had chosen the old pronunciation, even though most of the strangers she met, unless they taught or did research at one of the King's colleges, did not recognize it. That did not stop her parents from telling her about their belief in her greatness based on the goddess they had named her after. And yet, they had entrusted her with her brother's chores on account of his starvation-induced illness.

The airship returned, flying directly above the milling crowds in the square. Its metal figurehead, Iuno's namesake, wielded a scepter with her right arm. The queen of the old gods, the one most people knew and worshipped as Juno, the title of the war vessel itself. Her expression was at once serene and proud, assured of her success.

Iuno clenched the bolts in her arms. One day, she would stop this regression in time, this reverence of the Old, and separate the joined worlds into what they used to and should be.

Beginning with her brother's uniform.

BREAKFAST WITH THE CREATOR OF SPACE AND TIME

Emily Wong

This is how breakfast goes: eggs first. Always. A side of plasma grapes, to lighten the palette. The Bagel of Gaseous Substances. Nebulas and blueberry jam overtop.

It is the season of star juvenility. They are frolicking in the beyond, working out by the planets, growing the hottest summer bod. They were little stars in the last season, clumps of dust with personalities just as gullible. As they grow they get heavier. More attractive. They'll host storms and call them identities. Soon they sit motionless in their kingdoms, drawing all matters of matter toward themselves, until they swallow all and combust into new little stars.

I sit, far far away. New worlds have been made, and I get to watch them unfold as I wish. Get a little me time. Even a Creator of Time and Space needs a break – a little dalliance into their passion projects. I pull out my yarn and start crocheting the Fabric of Time.

It is monotonous to some: the same action, on repeat. It is just yarn. They are just words. There are finite combinations of them, surely—and perhaps, this is true. But Entropy is unrestrained, wild. The shapes drawn by my hand are free to change as they please, and the yarn is endless, for the Spool of Time continues to unravel, and there are always new stories to spin.

I miss a stitch. Susan Johnson gets married five years earlier and her best friend dies heartbroken at eighty-four. The yarn is too coarse to unravel and try redoing a stitch, so we carry forward, we must carry forward. Leave it to the characters to smooth out the fibres in their stories.

Slip stitch. I add a chain. Paxton Chan adopts five cats. He goes bankrupt within the year.

My fingers cramp. I work through eight more rows, back and forth, year after year. I stab my hook into the top of a stitch—some of

the fibres fray immediately. Milk goes bad. A phone battery explodes. A girl breaks up with her partner, a pink thread snaps clean in half, browning at the edges. Heartbreak.

It is taxing. The emotions, the thoughts, the feelings they leave raging inside them, inside me. Somewhere in an adjacent time-thread of pink, the girl is a knight, fighting thicket and famine to clasp the hand of her lover one last time. She is felled at the palace gates, in the somber dusk.

A plasma grape fizzles between my teeth. Oh, but this time-thread is different. She fights. A green thread still stands at the core of burnt pink, fragile, but defiant. Her heart trembles and the scales of a dragon may be akin to the stiffest metal, but still she bleeds, still she learns and still she loves. I watch the stitch heal itself, growing steadily in emerald shades, sparkling beneath the nail of my thumb as she fights, she fights, she fights.

I bite into the Bagel of Gaseous Substances. Lick nebulas and blueberry jam from my fingers, and let the stories tell themselves.

FROM WIND AND SALT

Miran Tsay

I remember that the summer I met Ru, the rainy season ran late. My mother and I got off the high-speed rail during a downpour and waited for Ojichan to pick us up, our shoes wet and smarting. He gave us both melon soda and spoke of the flooding roads. The sewage system was backlogged and pooling on lawns. The water level was so high that people could boat to the market. It's because of the wind spirits, he said, grumpy and certain. You pray to them, he continued, a communal diagnosis that now also extended to us, and then ran a red.

I began to look for evidence of the gods. In my periphery, I could make out the light bending around the convenience store or a hand stirring up the port. Shira-dori was the same as it always was each summer. I knew each road by its turn and each house by its last name. So when I saw Ru, I was surprised. I'd never seen someone with hair that long. I was sure I'd found a wind spirit, but it was only another girl my age, which was even rarer.

"Have you heard them sing?" Ru asked a few days into knowing me. I shook my head, and followed her past the deserted police shack, the Kaminori river, the crest of the mountain and into the next. I'd never left the domesticated gardens and roads and kept expecting to lose sight of the smoke from the town chimneys, but was too exhilarated by our shared freedom to turn back.

"Here," she said, foliage piled high on us. "Listen."

The wind threaded itself through the trees and needled the seastacks. By the time it turned the bend of the mountain, there was a faint hum. I was delighted.

Ru showed me the rest of my town, that summer. She knew every nook and cranny. She turned the port inside out, swimming for clams under the wave-breakers and following each stream to where it pooled. We called out to the giant clouds and waited for them to drop on us. When it downpoured, we stood on the beach and let the waves crash over us. We were invincible.

The floods were even worse in August, and so we built boats and set sail for the neighbours' houses, piled high with plum jam and messages. We'd walk to the temporary lakes and build make-shift temples for the gods. We sat with lizards in the sun and fish in the rain. I swallowed so much sea water that summer I remember thinking I must have been half-salt.

Ru left at the end of August. On her last day, we climbed up Mt. Ira and I lingered behind her on the way down, crying. I wanted the mountain slope to last forever. I wanted summer to stay. I didn't know when I'd see her again.

I still don't know. Sometimes when I'm back in Shira-dori, I think I see her across the beach or under the steep bridges. I find myself straining in the wind and rain to find her. We didn't have many of them that summer, but now I often trick myself into seeing her on sunny days. The giant summer clouds float by, and for some reason, I'm convinced she found a way up there. I tilt my head in greeting. Sometimes, the wind waves back.

How to Deal with a Mimic

by the

Ministry in Managing Impatient Questgoers

Biew Biew Sakulwannadee

Congratulations on earning your dungeon exploring certificate! As you head into those dank and dangerous depths, you will encounter a variety of foes. While your previous training has prepared you for simple-minded creatures like goblins and orcs, it doesn't cover the stranger ones that are arguably more dangerous *(because those who tried all got eaten)!*

In today's article, we'll be talking about....Mimics! These sneaky fellows are known for their ability to shapeshift into any household object, though their main disguise of choice remains a medium-sized wooden chest. They also like munching on humans with their ~~disgusting~~ very shiny teeth.

You may be asking, "Is there any way I can spot a Mimic with my pale blue orbs?" And the answer is...NO! They're so good at mimicking that even the most wizened of adventurers can get snapped up in their jaws. And you, my loot-loving lassie, are certainly no wise adventurer, so you're even more likely to get tricked by them!

In order to prevent that very delicious end, here are a few strategies that are GUARANTEED* to work when you come across a very nice-looking chest in an empty room and you're not sure if it's a mimic or not.

- Lower your defensive spells. Deactivate that mage armor, don't even think to pop up a shield. Mimics are fond of chunky, crispy, magic-filled meals, not just a plain ol' human. That's like eating a plain slice of bread!
- Grab your massive salt jar and throw some salt towards the mimic. Because of its very smooth brain, it'll confuse the salt for some tasty sugar. Its tongue acts like a slug: when the mimic sticks it out to taste the salt, its tongue will shrivel up. When that happens, you brandish your sword and go for the kill!
- Get up and personal: be face-to-face with that golden lock. DO. NOT. BLINK. The Mimic will be so intimidated that it won't even dare to eat you. You are the predator staring down its prey.
- Do a little dance. Mimics in their natural state are like a slimy dog. This means they love to do a bit of a boogie woogie, and the more flamboyant your dance, the more the mimic sees you as a friend and not food.
- Words can definitely hurt them. Do a comedy routine. Start roasting that brown hunk of junk! It'll laugh so hard that it won't notice the sword sticking down its throat.

If, by some chance that you don't follow these instructions and get stuck in a mimic's jaws, DO. NOT. PANIC! Simply play dead. Slide down that looonnnggg dark esophagus. Mimics aren't necrophages, so they'll spit you right out once you hit their stomach.

So grab your salt, sheath your sword, and march through those drag-on-filled dungeons with unbridled confidence! Now you know how to take care of those pesky mimics and their voracious appetite once and for all!

Bon Appétit!

* We are not liable for greivous harm, missing limbs, or deceased party members

INTO THE HILLS

Amy Yang

"Nika," my mother nudged me in the shoulder. "Go dance." She gestured to the group of girls dancing around the bonfire. Their hands were intertwined as they skipped haphazardly and out of sync. I could hear the laughter from here.

"Yes, Mother." I wiped my dirty palms on the rough material of my skirt, resigned to bring my mother this one joy. I threw one last look at the mountain peak behind my shoulder and made my way cautiously to the dancing girls.

One of them—Marie, I think—saw me first. She smiled, drunk on joy, and shouted at everyone to make room. They dragged me along in their broken rhythm, pulling me into its lure. The hands against mine were sweaty, but soft. None of them spoke to me on a regular day, but tonight was different. Embers caught in our hair like fireflies as our bare feet kicked up dirt around the bright solstice fire.

Summer was beginning.

The world brimmed with possibilities.

My eyes drifted closed as we kept dancing; I was lost in the splendor, however brief. When the dancing lulled, everyone stopping to catch their breath, I finally peeled my eyes open again.

I found myself staring into a woman's face.

She was made of fire.

And *so familiar*—like someone who'd always been just behind my shoulder – whom I'd catch glimpses of in polished silver, but never see face to face, not like now. Her anguish was visceral. Haunting. It was so alive, I thought I could touch it.

Her eyes pulled back, mouth opened wide, to scream or to cry, I don't know—

Then I blinked, and she was gone.

The bonfire roared. There was no woman to be seen.

I looked around me, heart beating frantically. All the girls had drifted away. The men were drunk on mead, stumbling, as their wives helped the matron pack up the feast. I spotted my siblings in the distance, chasing each other in circles with the other village children.

Instead of joining them, my gaze found its way back, as it always did, to the mountain looming in the west, a steady pillar against the night sky. Something deeply rooted in me was drawn towards it, constantly and inexplicably. Just like I was drawn to that woman in the fire.

After an unsettling moment, I tore myself away.

That night, I dreamt of her. She was made of flesh this time, not flame – a real, vivid person staring into a looking glass. Her brows were drawn low in worry. When my face appeared in the reflection beside hers, relief then fear flickered across her face in quick succession. She reached a hand to the mirror and I noticed the burns on her palms, angry and swollen and red. She leaned in close and whispered,

Come save me.

I woke up breathless, drenched in sweat. Not in my cot, but on the floor beside it. The stone was cold beneath my blazing hands. Within it, I could feel the mountain, jarringly awake, pulsing in sync with my erratic heart.

I needed to leave.

STARFALL

Phoebe Sozou

When Marianna Merchant was a little girl, an angel crash-landed in her attic.

By this point in her brief life, she was already accustomed to stumbling into strange and wonderful things. Each discovery was proof that the world had always been bizarre and exciting, and she clung to its strangeness as doggedly as that strangeness clung to it.

The day the angel fell to earth, Marianna was waiting, as she did every Sunday, for her sister to come home from church. Madge was as relentless about turning up to services as Marianna was about avoiding them; she recalled little about the village chapel save for the fact that the angel did not seem like a creature who belonged to it.

The angel looked like a boy. He was roughly her age, shorter, with close-cropped hair and twitchy fingers. She had understood him from the moment she'd found him sprawled across her attic floor in a pool of glass shards, blinking up at her as though he thought he was in trouble.

He had come and gone within the space of two glorious, sun-drenched weeks, and that had been that. Marianna was used to goodbyes—good at them, even. She said them and she gathered up her skirt and she went on looking for the next adventure—until.

Until.

There was time, still, *until.*

For now, there were the moors.

The Battersea house stood crooked and proud on the lip of the cliff. Bracketed by dark waters and rolling moors, it seemed as much a fixture of the land as a canyon or a crater. There were no moors without the abandoned manor or the purple lungwort which grew in its cool shadow, and there was no Marianna without her moors, so she found herself drawn to the dark frame of the house by something fixed between fascination and unrest.

It was a grim summer day when the angel returned, and Marianna was in search of a new adventure on the Battersea estate with a reluctant Madge in tow.

"Marianna," Madge groaned, "let me go, please." She bullied herself in front of Marianna with a huff. She was a centimetre taller, her dark red curls ironed straight while Marianna's floated around her head in a cloudlike thatch of crimson. Otherwise, it was like looking into a mirror which could only reflect progressively angrier versions of yourself back at you.

"If I let you go," Marianna said, "you'll go back home. You never hang out with me anymore."

Madge was embroiled in the relentless and sinister process of growing up. Marianna was embroiled in the equally relentless but, in her opinion, far more noble undertaking of talking her out of it.

Madge scowled. "You never do anything *normal*."

She had nearly wrested her hand free of Marianna's grip when the sky began to warp, the grey clouds shivering before turning white, then red, then black. All light receded to a single point arcing through the atmosphere, which stuttered in midair, buffeted by the wind, and pinwheeled straight through the house's crumbling roof with a sound like thunder.

Madge gaped at the hollow where the roof had just been.

Marianna was used to goodbyes—good at them, even. Now, as a plume of smoke billowed overhead, she realized she was quite ready to be good at something else.

"There's someone I'd like you to meet."

THE FAERIE OF THE BALCONY

Nathan Agustin

An eternity ago, wind blasted me from the forest into the sky above the city. Smog and toxins clawed through my body. The only nature was miles below, in the form of man-planted trees and dandelions breaking through concrete, all of which I couldn't reach without diving into the heart of pollution.

There was one respite in this city, a pot of rosemary on an apartment balcony. It was frail and young yet far from the toxicity below. I flew to that pot and buried myself inside. It was damp enough to make the soil soft yet not enough to drown the plant, a careful balance few can strike.

I awoke surrounded by more plants: sprouting tomatoes, infant peppers, and freshly planted zucchini. The owner stared at me with a grin on his face.

Most humans saw my gossamer wings and swatted me like vermin. This one was different. He told me how much he struggled, to pay whatever "bills" and "debt" were. When he saw me sleeping, he couldn't leave me alone.

With newly found strength, magic flowed from me in waves. Instantly, the plants matured with the ripest of fruits one could imagine. A single bite and he was enamoured.

For weeks, I remained on his balcony. He ate the food I grew for him, and he provided me shelter from the city. Had I known what I do now, I would've left then. The poison of the city was no match for what would come next.

One of his neighbours asked for one of his vegetables. The man, out of the same kindness that welcomed me, obliged. She found it so delicious, she couldn't resist paying him. But the next day, more people came.

More food.

More money.

More magic.

My magic couldn't stop growing the plants so long I was awake. Could a human stop themself from blinking or drawing breath?

The future was nothing but a restless fervor. Earlier and earlier, he'd wake me to grow his plants to sell. Even heartbeats of stillness were luxuries. My only respite was that, once the world turned cold, I would pass on as all my brethren would.

However, once the leaves turned, he had built a prison of glass for me. The warmth would keep me awake and alive. White would blanket the city, the other forest Fae would pass on.
Yet I would remain.

I turned to fly away but he was faster. The worst part was that, through it all, he was still kind. Gentle hands gripped me and he smiled as he locked me inside.

So long has passed in this artificial immortality. I can no longer beg for death, for all that leaves my mouth is a hollow, dull noise.

The man will sometimes hold his cage in front of his customers. They will applaud the man's hard work for they will see the lavish moss of my enclosure and high-quality sunlamp. Children will tug their parent's sleeve and beg for their own. I will groan again and they will smile wider.

For who would recognize my plea in the face of a man so kind?

THE GIRL, THE PRINCE,
AND THE SUMMER THAT NEVER WAS

Adaora Olisa

Age 11: Claire couldn't believe the old door behind the shed would lead to a throne room, like the ones in fantasy novels, much less to a beautiful prince. With an outstretched hand, he grins, as if expecting her.

Age 13: She spends most of her time in front of the mirror. Judging the girl before her, with her flat chest, acne-riddled face, and boring brown eyes.

The Prince and her go to retrieve his favourite crown from the ferocious Red Dragon, who hides deep within the mountains.

However, they end up meeting his friendlier brother, the Yellow Dragon, who only shares his loot with beautiful women. To Claire's surprise, the dragon takes a great liking to her. He tells her she has the most gorgeous brown eyes he's ever seen.

He's the only one who's given such a compliment. And for now, that's enough for her.

Age 14: Her parents decide that the local high school isn't good enough for her. In her new environment, she watches as her classmates trade lipgloss, gum, and secret smiles. A girl glances at her before smirking and turns to whisper something in her friend's ear.
Claire walks to each class wishing that the floor would open up, swallowing her into darkness.

That summer, they visit the Great Owl, whose feathers are rumoured to contain the answers to all of life's problems.

After plucking a feather off, the two squint to read the words: It is when one is alone, that they come to know their true selves.

As to not feel like they wasted their time, they spend the rest of the day flying on the owls' back. It's up there in the sky that **Claire almost forgets about whispering girls and empty seats at lunch.**

Almost.

Age 16: She's pretty sure her boyfriend is cheating on her. Of course, he would never admit it.

As she gazes upon the stars, where a tiger and a lion made of constellations duke it out, she confesses that she's not sure if anyone will love her.

The Prince doesn't say anything to that, and frankly, she had hoped he wouldn't. Instead, he takes her hand in his, and plants a kiss so gentle, she might as well have imagined it.

Yet she goes to bed that night cradling her kissed hand, like it's the only real thing she has.

Age 17: Her parents are on their way back home when a truck takes a wrong turn.

That summer, Claire spends most of her time inside. The garbage bin overflows with cards that all say the same thing: sorry for your loss.

Now every time she looks in the mirror, she sees the girl that she always was: ugly, lonely, and wholly unremarkable.

Age 18: Claire's not sure if she believes in fairytales anymore.

When she pushes open the rusted door, it groans under the weight. She's in the throne room once more, and it's as if someone had vacuumed out all the colours, leaving behind a sad grey. The Prince is nowhere to be seen.

She enters another room, with its grey walls rotten with decay. In the centre, stands an open chest filled with all the keepsakes from their adventures. A pearl necklace gifted to her by mermaids, a book with never-ending pages, an instrument that contains all the sounds in the world.

She starts crying, though she doesn't understand why. Perhaps because she knows deep down that there'll be no more adventures.

At some point, the Prince enters the room. She doesn't notice him until he wraps his arms around her, and she turns to cry against his chest. It occurs to her that she never got his name.

He holds her as the world around them falls.

the hills

Ola Kim

Proof of leaving the city becomes present in the appearance of telephone wires. It's not something you notice until you realize you've never seen them before.

The city is dense enough that the signal can loop around the outskirts of the mountains and still be strong enough to host a civilization. Urban peters off into green, wires thread through the hills like webs. It's always been the thing that distinguishes these city streets from any other in the world. No telephone poles. They look alien here, all the way up.

The highest point. Feet know altitude. Even if the land barely shifts, your soles know they're going up. The trail curls round and round.

On the other side, they had said, *the trees open up.* Just wait for the view on the other side, and then the road curves around north and gives way to sky.

You've never seen the sky without mountains and trees and skyscrapers blocking the way. So high up. Higher than the humidity, hot, dense thickness giving way to space. Just pure air. All the way into the mainland, the ocean disappears.

It used to be said that there was power in the mountains. That all that earth was piled there to hold something. And a bit like how sleep is the greatest consolidator of memories, your mind sharpens after the years you've spent away. Like a native language coming back to nest in you. The mountain in you. Roosting and hosting.

The only thing taller than the mountains is the sky. And yet, three trills of birdsong, so round and deep you could be convinced it was a human mouth forming around the soft sound. Human, or something else. Lately they say the mountains speak.

The city breathes beneath. But lately, they say the mountains bellow.

Under your hiking shoes, the spread of molten rock. Layers of earth, the slow crawl of land, like folds of skin. Warmth slopes its way through the morning and the ground seems to rise to meet it, writhing

under your feet, a creature lifting its face to the sun.

They used to say there was ancient power buried in the mountains. That no one would ever think to find it here. But still there is evidence of life. Little pictures. A wasp finding a home in a splintered rock, surety of flight like it knew how to find safety. A wild dog looking not nearly hungry enough, well-fed prosperity.

They say the city didn't appear until the mountains did. Rising from nothing. That the telephone poles grew first. Wires threading like webs through hills. A perimeter. City blurring in through the humidity. The mist. They said you wouldn't be able to find anything that others hadn't found. That there was nothing the mountains could give you besides a view. But still you had to climb.

Tectonic plates collide to form mountains. A mountain is a geological event.

These hills are something else. No conformity to the earth's structure. Only their own.

THE KISS OF THE SUMMER QUEEN

Katarina Kojic

She never expected to fall in love with the Summer Queen.

It was supposed to be a quick trip down the river. Elena was going to say that their relationship was done, that certain emotions between an archaeologist and a deity could never be felt. She climbed out of her small motorboat ready to beg the question if what they shared was really love. It couldn't be—

But then she was standing in front of Her.

Her lips were life itself, painted in dark gold. Sparkles shone through the torn, chapped parts of Her skin, like sprouts of green breaking through concrete, revealing their face to the sun. She imagined that kissing Her would quicken her already pounding heart. Her feet were bare, toes unpainted. Branches circled around Her ankles, thorns poking into Her calves. Roses grew on the ground from where Her sparkling blood spilt. The Queen didn't seem to feel pain, for Her blood created life.

The first time they met, she plucked a rose from Her leg.

Elena could feel her body shrivel into itself, the shallow cuts from the bushes burning. The deep gash in her stomach was throbbing. She wasn't sure if the blood loss was getting to her or if this was truly reality. All she wanted to do was hide from the glowing figure standing in front of her...Could she beg for forgiveness? I didn't mean to intrude, *she would reason.* A current threw me overboard. *I'll never tell anyone,* she would say.

Instead, the Queen plucked a rose from Her leg, not seeming to care about the glowing blood spilling everywhere, and placed it in the hole of Elena's gaping wound. The petals grew, preventing the blood from pooling over. The Summer Queen just nodded her head silently and walked away. Since then, Elena visited every evening for the next two months.

She would take her supervisor's motorboat down the river, avoiding the areas where the currents were the strongest. She would walk the hour-long trek and observe Her doing mundane tasks;

watering the plants with the river's water, pulling the weeds out of her tulip garden. Her eyes, a burning amber, would glow whenever She would catch Elena hiding in the trees.

It took them two weeks to exchange words with each other. They would talk about everything but the obvious. *Did you find anything meaningful in your research,* the Queen asked.
No, Elena replied, hiding what she wanted to say: *just you.*

Her supervisor was a dreamer. A man who believed in tales of *El Dorado* and *Atlantis of the Sands*. Where gold would form in the waters and where Ambrosian apples would grow in the trees. How silly.

By the end of the two months, Elena didn't think she would be able to leave with her supervisor. For finding Her was a treasure greater than anything the waters of El Dorado would give her.

THE QUALITIES OF THE WISE

Ciara Drummond

What a wonderfully tragic place to die, Hero, a man with little skill or character, thought. He breathed in the sharp, magical air of the Godmother's forest, as he pretended he was closer to the safe, familiarity of home. *And, not on a quest risking my life.*

Red flowers withered under Hero's fingers as his armour burned the magic out of the plant's small body. But Hero couldn't be bothered. *The ugly thing could suffer.* Hero toyed with the flowers around his path until he came upon the object of his desire.

His reason for everything he'd ever done.

Her altar. My destiny.

The Godmother's altar had aged: the stone had cracked, the trees wrapped their roots around it like a tomb, and moss consumed the inscription. Hero breathed to release the ache in his stomach before he lit the three candles, offered the food and the finest diamonds his tutors could find, and laid down his favorite sword.

Suddenly, with a puff of smoke, just like the legends foretold, the Godmother appeared. She was younger, more beautiful than the hero had expected a woman older than time to be. But, strangely, for a supposed miracle-worker, she lacked a kind face.

"My kingdom is starving," Hero pleaded. The woman ignored him as she bent down to the flowers Hero killed, and with a brush of her finger, she brought the flowers back to life. "Madam Godmother?"

"I heard you," the Godmother said, "What I do not understand is why you are here, in my forest, with your petty problems."

"My people are dying." The witch offered no answer, so he continued. "The legends say if I gave an offering, you would help me,"

"And what do you have to offer me?"

"My lady, I gave you my sword, the best gems from my people, and food to feed you."

"I do not fight. So, I have no use for your sword. I do not eat human food. So, I have fed your slop to the animals of the forest. I do not barter, nor am I vain. I will dispose of your gems. I have no use of your worthless offerings. You must give me something I actually desire. The question is what can you offer me?"

Hero paused. Rejected. Helpless.

But Hero would not fail here. *He refused.*

He sacrificed too much and came too far to give up now.

"Anything," he said. "Anything you want."

The Godmother smiled, offering him an apple. "Here. Eat this and take my blessing."

Hero felt a pull towards the apple in the witch's hand—a ravenous hunger. Hero would sell cities and burn down kingdoms for taste, to stop the aches he felt consuming his body. He was empty; the hunger rotted his insides in search of something to feed it.

He snatched the apple from the witch's hand, swallowing it whole.

Heaven.

It tasted like sweet sin and divine heaven. Hero could stay here forever, eating the apples of his blessed witch. But, she sent him on his way, disappeared and *sealed* her apples far away.

And then, it begun. The apple grew. Tore through Hero's body, turning his skin to wood. The armour held the magic at bay and killed any branch that wiggled free. The curse adapted, but it was content to remain bound as long as it had flesh to feed on.

Eventually, all that was left was a tree cased in armour.

"Foolish boy," the witch cackled.

WE HAVE TO STOP MEETING LIKE THIS

Chris Tang

WITH THE REST OF MY HEARTBEATS

Jacky Yu

It is ten years after Marcus. I still have two hundred million heartbeats.

With nothing else to pass the time, I lay on an empty spot in the alley with a dirty streetlight, and I remember.

—

I remember the hanging lamplights on the grass of his family's orchard the first evening. The delivery men took me in the back of their Ford, singing John Denver off-key all the way across the winding mountain roads. Sometimes a goat or hare or gaggle of geese would jump out of the bushes and declare pedestrian right-of-way, causing a frantic stop and a lurch forward. I feared that the oil would come straight out of my ears and spill all over my dress. It would have never happened, but I was young then.

As the lights emerged awake and bathed the sky in orange, I arrived at the only place I could call home.

I stop my memory process to shoo away a stray who's taken interest in me. It thinks I am a corpse, licking my face and using me as a mattress. A brief whirring and flash of blue eyes make it jolt away.

The streetlight flickers.

—

I remember how the boy with eyes like a doe hid behind his broad father. A baritone voice from the imposing figure coaxed me towards them.

"He needs a tutor. Take him outside and show him what it's like outside."

—

The cat is back. It's a scrawny, stubborn thing, clinging on to life. There are patches of skin through its matted black fur, and it limps towards me.

Go away. I can't give you food. I can't give you warmth either.

Above me, the light is growing dim.

—

During the day, I would bring him down to see the sprawl of factories churning bile out chimneys, above the surging mass of panhandlers and rats chasing for the same scraps below the pipes, under a pitch black sky covered by stalactite cables. Fighting to live for what?

At night, when we went back, he showed me the pond where the grass carp lay and the cattails rocked softly to the rhythm of the wind. He taught me how to catch a firefly near the creek, and place it in a bottle. He taught me to create a noise called laughter.

—

-

I could use a firefly right now. The darkness encroaches. The stray whimpers toward me. It is a miracle it survived this long with the radiation exposure.

—

"How long will you stay with me, Lupa?"

Until my end. We have a set amount of beats in the "heart" that powers us. Mine is set to one billion. We are paired with a companion that matches our creation date, and expire when they can rely on themselves. You can live without me by then.

"What will I do then? I'm afraid, Lupa. I'm afraid that one day I'm going to look back and realize that I've been without you more than with you... and forget how to miss you."

Nothing would make me happier than that. Though if you really do miss me, live for me and do what you would do if I were still there. If you don't have a goal yet, catch a firefly every day. Or take a

walk. Or a step. And one day you'll find some meaning in it. I can't tell you why to live. Only that you should.

—

One hundred million heartbeats later, I found myself in the situation he should have been in.

The world is imperfectly quiet. Clogged with smoke and uranium.

The light has been extinguished. The power has run out.

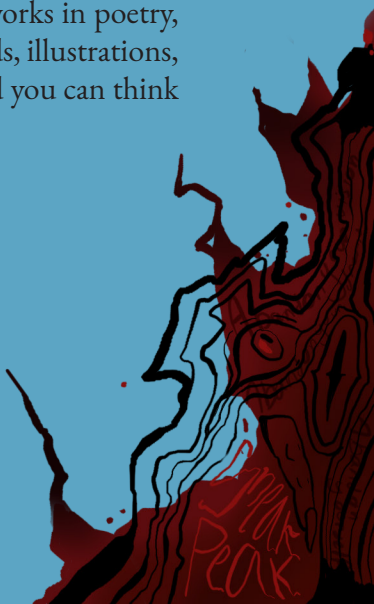
—

I decide to scoop up the cat.

I take a step out of the alley.

There may still be some fireflies around.

ABOUT THE SPEC

The Spectatorial is the University of Toronto's only genre-focused journal. Started in 2013, our masthead and writers work with mythical creatures, the gothic, outer space, and all things in between. We also have a blog where we post non-fiction: analyses, essays, and op-eds on speculative fiction media all year-round! Have a pitch? Shoot us an email at thespectatorial@gmail.com, or check out https://thespectatorial.ca/ for blog post inspiration.

Thank you for reading! This year, we're running zines just like this one to platform flash fiction during both semesters. Each zine will centre on a different genre. We're opening the call for pitches for our next zine, and the genre is **HORROR: the abandoned.** Keep updated with our Instagram @thespectatorial and join our Discord for dates and send us your pitches, drafts, ideas, or completed works in poetry, prose, maps, character profiles, Pokémon cards, illustrations, comics, and anything else **HORROR**-related you can think of!